

## Reflective Writing

The new Program of Studies and Core Content for Assessment describe the goals of reflective writing:

“Students will analyze and communicate reflectively about literacy goals.”

*Program of Studies*

In Reflective Writing, students will

- evaluate personal progress toward meeting goals in literacy skills
- develop the connection between literacy skills (reading and writing) and understanding of content knowledge
- describe their own literacy skills, strategies, processes or areas of growth
- analyze own decisions about literacy goals
- evaluate own strengths and areas for growth
- support claims about self

*Core Content for Assessment 4.1*

In **no way** is this Core Content 4.1 a checklist for students. The reflective piece might address some of these indicators, but in no way could the piece address them all and remained focused. Because students should be writing reflectively in many situations, they will meet these indicators differently.

## What is the purpose for the reflective piece in the Writing Assessment Portfolio?

The purpose of the reflective piece is for students to analyze their growth as writers through the “lens” of literacy growth and goals. Given that purpose, students may focus the pieces many ways.

The **focus** is the way a writer achieves the **purpose**.

Purpose and focus work similarly in all categories of writing, so perhaps this will be easier to understand by looking at a category with which all teachers are very familiar—personal writing—and making the same connection with reflective writing.

Think about it like this:

In personal writing, a student may have as his purpose to analyze the significance of a relationship, let's say, with his grandmother. While that is his purpose, he may focus the piece in many ways.

- He might focus on a particular summer he spent with his grandmother that was particularly special.

- He might look at the relationship through the “lens” of a Thanksgiving dinner she prepared for the family and then, through the detail and discussion at the dinner table, show how this relationship was so special.
- He might focus on that relationship by showing in the piece how supportive his grandmother was at different points in his life.

**Each of these descriptions of ways to focus would still help the student fulfill the same purpose.** The piece would be as individual and unique as the student himself. Reflective writing works the same way.

**Thus, the focus is the way a writer achieves his purpose.**

In a reflective piece for the portfolio, a student may want to analyze his literacy growth and goals (purpose), but he may **achieve** that purpose in myriad ways.

### **Focusing in Reflective Writing to Analyze Growth in Writing**

#### **Possible scenarios:**

A student writer might analyze his growth as a writer by focusing on a particular learning experience that improved his literacy.

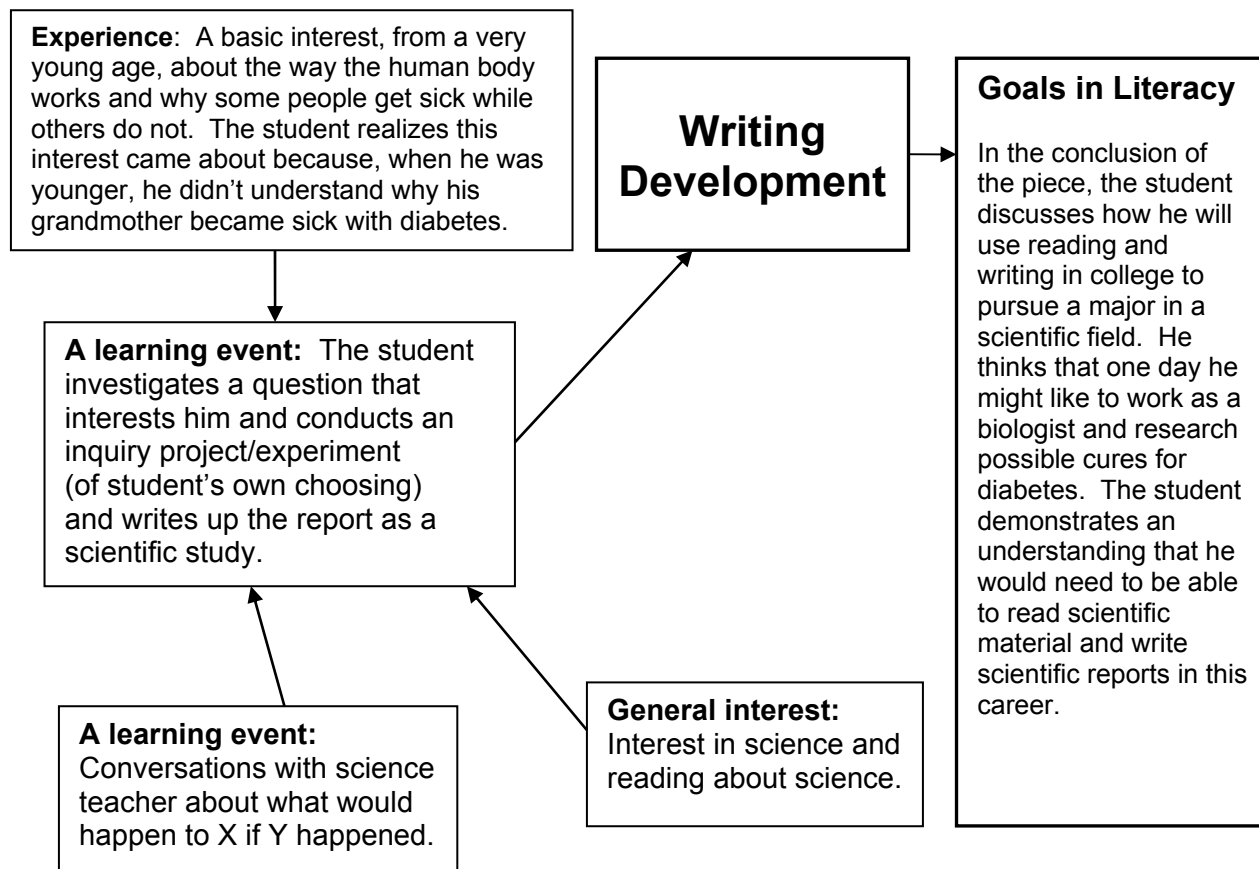
- For example, he might analyze the inquiry process he went through to write the analytical lab report he included in his portfolio. The piece would be very individual and unique to the student.
- A student might, instead, talk about how she developed in writing through an interest in reading. Perhaps as a child she read every Nancy Drew mystery available. She noticed that as she grew up, the reading experiences influenced her writing as she liked to write stories that were mysterious. This sparked her interest in writing (and thus reinforced the interest in reading), and, as she grew, her writing growth is evident in the mystery story she included in her portfolio. She analyzes how this all came together.
- As a third example—same purpose, to analyze growth as a writer through literacy—a student might recognize the importance a particular teacher played in his growth. He writes either a personal essay showing how this happened—how the learning experiences he had while in that teacher’s class helped make him the writer he is today. Or, he might write a letter to that teacher, discussing particular learning experiences that really made an impression on him.

**In any of these examples, the purpose is the same. The focus is different and provides a way for the writer to achieve his/her purpose.**

To accomplish the purpose of reflecting on writing development (by way of literacy growth and goals), a student may describe himself/herself as a reader, writer and learner and examine the significance of the related experiences. The reflective piece should be as individual as the students. Teachers should not use a checklist of “things to include” in a reflective piece as this practice decreases ownership and authenticity in the students’ writing.

The diagram below is **theoretical**. The flowchart would be different for every student. However, it illustrates how specific learning and literacy experiences might impact writing development, and thus, cause the student to consider goals for the future.

### Sample mapping exercise for reflective writing\*\*



In this example, the student is organizing for a reflective piece about his writing development through literacy experiences. He sees several experiences that led to a particular learning event (his inquiry project in science class). In the piece itself, he would connect these experiences to his writing development. According to the map in his conclusion, the student might discuss how he will use reading and writing in college to pursue a major in a science field. He thinks he may would one day like to work as a chemist and do research on the cure for diabetes. The student demonstrates an understanding that he would need to be able to read scientific material and write scientific reports.

**\*\*A template is attached that you might use with your students to “map” literacy growth.**

### Common Concerns about the Reflective Piece in the Writing Assessment Portfolio

- This piece may come from a language arts class, but it might also be developed in a content area class. It doesn't have to be specifically a language arts piece,

particularly if it developed as a result of a literacy experience in that content. If it were developed in a content area class, it would count as a content area piece.

- In the reflective piece for the portfolio, a student might refer to a piece included in his portfolio as an example to support his reflection, but there is **no need to refer to all pieces**. Likewise, a student may choose not to refer directly to any piece and look at the collection as a whole to reflect on literacy development.
- If students' reflective pieces are unique as the students are individually, the reflective pieces are probably on target, and the students are reflecting on their own personal writing and literacy growth.
- If all of the reflective pieces seem to sound alike, students are not doing the proper kind of thinking and analysis the reflective piece calls for. This would not make a portfolio incomplete, but the piece would probably not score very well.
- There is not one "right" way to write this piece. It will vary from student to student; however, there are several characteristics that show strong reflection in writing.

A strong reflective piece would, most likely, illustrate many, if not all, of these characteristics:

- Demonstrates specific literacy experiences that show impact/growth in writing.
- Demonstrates significance of literacy experiences through insightful analysis of learning events.
- Targets a specific audience and shows careful consideration of audience's needs to clearly communicate the purpose of the piece.
- Demonstrates careful idea development and makes connections to writing by way of literacy growth experiences.
- Demonstrates clear organization with insightful connections through analysis and reflection.
- Demonstrates narration of experience for the transactive purpose of analyzing growth in literacy to show impact on writing and learning (may narrate an event for the transactive purpose of informing)
- Demonstrates careful choice of form given purpose and audience.
- Is very individual to the student and his/her learning experiences.
- Demonstrates student clearly understands his/her literacy goals.